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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of 114 (a 62.6% response rate) academic deans of predominantly IIA institutions (Carnegie Classification) to gather information concerning the equitable and fair treatment of department heads at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. The survey revealed that the duties of department heads included teaching/research; faculty recruitment, development, evaluation, and assignment of duties; student recruitment, advising, record keeping, and recognition; curriculum development; budgeting; and facilities maintenance and planning. Almost 70 percent of the institutions provided a stipend for their department heads, stipends ranged from $300 to $5,000 per academic year, and most stipends were based on department size. There was little distinction between treatment of department heads in the professional and the liberal arts colleges within the same university. Ninety percent of respondents offered their department heads a teaching load reduction, generally one course per semester. Some institutions paid their department heads a higher salary from the outset, in place of stipends or load reductions. Other types of compensation provided to department heads included reserved parking, release from committee service, extra travel funds, and additional merit increase in salary. Components of the department head policy implemented by Butler University are outlined. (JDD)

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The Academic Department Head: Duties and Compensation

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Jean Endo
Editor
Forum Publications

ABSTRACT

All universities experience concerns regarding the equitable and fair treatment of department heads. What is reasonable incremental compensation for a 9- or 12-month appointment? What teaching load reduction should be granted to heads? How are the previous two issues impacted by the size of the department (either budget or faculty size)? Through a survey of 182 academic deans of predominantly IIA institutions (Carnegie Classification), Butler University was able to reconcile these issues by establishing a policy that has been applied uniformly across campus. The student findings should prove beneficial for all t[illegible]e involved in academic planning and policy formulation.

The Academic Department Head: Duties and Compensation

Introduction

Historically, the academic department has been a part of higher education since the turn of the century when fields of study were starting to become more numerous and specialized. This new structure required some form of leadership to serve as the link between the department's faculty, students and the administration and to facilitate the work of the department. Thus, the position of department head (or chair) emerged, usually filled by someone within the department chosen by colleagues to serve for a specified period of time. More recently, the head has been either elected by his/her department or appointed by an administrative superior for varying lengths of time. Whether appointed or elected, the head is the person responsible for providing direction for the department and for representing the discipline within the wider context of the institution.

The roles and responsibilities of department heads have been documented in many studies conducted over the last few decades. Though not mutually exclusive, most duties of the headship fall under one of two dimensions: academic or administrative. The academic dimension includes those duties involved with teaching, advising, research, student and faculty development and curriculum planning. The administrative dimension includes organizing the department, setting short- and long-term goals, chairing faculty meetings, managing the budget, attending to record-keeping, communicating the institution's mission and goals to the faculty, evaluating

faculty, identifying external resources, managing space needs and recruiting students and faculty. While these tasks may vary somewhat among different types of institutions, most department heads share common elements from this list of responsibilities.

While department head responsibilities are fairly evident through observation and have been detailed thoroughly in the literature, the issue of compensation is less understood. At Butler University, a private, comprehensive institution located in Indianapolis, some heads received a stipend for their administrative assignment, while others simply had a base salary which did not differentiate between teaching and academic duties. Some heads had a 9-month appointment while others had a 12-month obligation. Some taught a full load, while others taught very little. Because this lack of uniformity created real disparities, the Office of Institutional Research was asked by the Provost to assist in formulating a policy that would remedy across the board the inequitable treatment of department heads.

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature reveals many journal articles, monographs and books which document the role of department heads in the various classifications of colleges and universities. In fact, the recent monograph entitled **The Department Chair** (Seagren, Creswell and Wheeler 1993) summarizes most of the important research conducted on the subject over the last thirty years and examines the current status and future prospects for the position. Yet, only a single reference addresses the issue of compensation (Williams 1965). Here, the author suggests that department heads should receive no higher salary than that paid to professors within the department, but should be given lighter teaching loads. Realizing that this was not the common practice nationwide, Butler University decided to conduct its own study to better understand the

compensation practices prevalent among similar institutions across the country.

Methodology

The Office of Institutional Research devised a **Department Head Survey** to solicit the needed information from cohort institutions. The primary questions asked were:

1. What are the duties of the department head in your college?
2. Is a stipend paid department heads and, if so, does it cover nine or twelve months?
3. Is any other type of compensation provided?
4. Is a teaching load reduction provided for the head?

In March, 1991, the questionnaire was sent to 182 college deans at 147 predominantly IIA [Butler's Carnegie Classification] institutions along with instructions to return it via an included postage-paid envelope within two weeks. Since Butler University is comprised of five academic colleges, different units within some institutions were surveyed to determine if unique practices existed among the professional colleges/schools within the same institution; i.e., are heads compensated differently in a college of business than in a college of fine arts at the same institution?

Findings

One-hundred and fourteen surveys were returned (a 62.6% return rate). As requested, many institutions returned copies of their published policies regarding the department head. Regarding the first question, "What are the duties of the head at your college?" the following common themes were sounded:

- *Teaching/research;*

- *Faculty*: recruitment, orientation, development, evaluation, tenure and promotion, mediation, communication, assignment of teaching duties;
- *Students*: recruitment, counseling, advising, record keeping, degree requirements, mediate grievances, recognize achievement;
- *Curricula*: schedule departmental offerings, review syllabi, coordinate general education requirements, monitor programs and patterns of enrollment, coordinate curricular changes with accrediting agencies and university officials;
- *Budget*: planning (including revenue generating proposals such as grants) and controlling resources (monitor acquisitions and expenditures, maintain accurate records); and,
- *Facilities*: provide appropriate utilization, maintain equipment, plan for future departmental needs.

Regarding question number two, "Is a stipend paid department heads and, if so, does it cover nine or twelve months?" the following data were reported:

- Seventy-nine (69% of respondents) of the colleges provide a stipend for their department heads, 36 on a nine-month basis and 43 on a twelve-month basis; most stipends are based on department size; (three of the 79 offer either a stipend or a load reduction);
- Thirty-five (31%) colleges offer no stipend;
- There is little distinction between the professional and the liberal arts colleges within the same university; and
- Stipends range from $300 to $5,000 per academic year; and

Regarding the third question, "Is any other type of compensation provided?" limited responses included the following incentives:

- Reserved parking;
- Release from committee service;
- Extra travel funds; and,
- Additional merit increase in salary.

Regarding the fourth question, "Is a teaching load reduction provided for the head?"

- Ninety percent offer their heads a load reduction
- Ten percent of the respondents allow no reduction in teaching load;
- Eight percent of the total respondents provide neither stipend nor load reduction; and
- The predominant load reduction is one course per semester, with the remainder varying their loads dependent upon department size.

Other useful information gleaned from the survey included the findings that:

- Most heads are appointed for three-year terms which may be renewed once (and occasionally twice);
- Heads are selected by departmental faculty with approval of the dean and Academic Vice President; and
- The average load reduction is three hours from a "normal" teaching load of 12 hours per semester.

Follow-up telephone calls to several of the institutions which do not provide their heads stipends or load reductions revealed that some heads were paid a higher salary from the outset for their services, but not in the form of a

stipend. In other words, they were hired as department head and their initial contract reflected a salary that included their duties as head.

Summary

The information gleaned from this study provided the foundation and framework of a new department head policy that was implemented by Butler University. This policy includes:

- A refined definition of *department head* as someone who has a full range of responsibilities over a department including, but not limited to, the operational and planning aspects of personnel, curriculum, instruction, scholarship, advising, and budget;
- Incremental compensation one-ninth of the head's base salary for the academic year;
- Summer compensation of $1500 plus the option to teach one summer course for additional pay; in addition, may receive internal or external grants during the summer related to scholarly activity;
- Load reductions based upon size of department; departments of twelve faculty or fewer allow two 3-hour course reductions per year; departments of 13-18 provide three 3-hour course reductions per year, while departments with more than 19 faculty allow four course reductions per year;
- A possible permanent benefit after two 3-year terms of service as department head in the amount of 50% of most recent base 9-month stipend [this benefit is granted only if service has been deemed meritorious by the dean and the Provost]; and
- A policy for department heads on leave which transfers the stipend from the head to the acting head.

Conclusion

It is not uncommon for colleges and universities to experience concerns regarding the equitable and fair treatment of department heads. Yet, because no universal policies exist to answer questions regarding the reasonable compensation for 9- or 12-month headships or the size of teaching load reduction, institutions are forced either to make educated guesses or to rely on their own surveys. Through a nationwide survey of academic deans, Butler University was able to reconcile these issues by establishing a policy that has been applied uniformly across the campus. This policy may serve as a valuable model for other private, comprehensive universities which have wrestled with similar issues.

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